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NEWS SEARCH

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Adoptions bring special joy during holidays

By Chad Halcom, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

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Kaitlin, 2, plays with a stuffed toy furnished by her newly adoptive mother, Tonia, during formal adoption proceedings Tuesday before Macomb County Circuit Judge Mark S. Switalski. Tonia and husband Mark, of Warren, adopted Kaitlin and her 3-year-old sister, Alexis, after receiving them through the foster care system.



Macomb Daily photo by David N. Posavetz

Home, hearth and happy family are among things Americans celebrate with gratitude this time of year; for a few Macomb County children and new parents, the holidays will have special significance after adoption proceedings this week.

Nine children became a part of four new families following a formal hearing before Macomb County Circuit Judge Mark S. Switalski at the county's juvenile court building in Mount Clemens. Some of the new parents are blood relations such as grandparents or uncles and aunts, while others met tiny little strangers through the state foster care system and bonded with them.

"We just started wanting them in our lives to raise them. We've had them since they were a few months and several weeks old," said Mark, a Warren man who along with his wife, Tonia, adopted two girls in Tuesday's proceedings. "It's amazing, being a family with them now."

The kids in Macomb were among 240 or so children to be legally and publicly adopted in in 34 counties Tuesday. The Michigan Supreme Court and the state Family Independence Agency coordinated those events to observe National Adoption Day, an annual event which was Saturday as part of an effort to find homes and families for 126,000 children in the nation's foster care programs.

SECTION LINKS

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All nine children in Macomb's proceedings had belonged to biological mothers or fathers whose parental rights were terminated, and eventually became wards of the court. As of September, some 19,490 children were in Michigan's foster care system and 4,584 of them were permanent wards of the court, with a goal of adoption placement.

For Janet, a Mount Clemens woman who adopted four grandchildren as her own, the proceedings Tuesday were joyful and bittersweet since their biological mother is not capable of raising the children.

"It's a good day. I'm glad it's finally here," she said, wiping a tear outside of court. "And we're going to do the best we all can together."

Judge Switalski, the presiding judge of the circuit court's family division and himself an adoptive parent with children from overseas, said he sees advantages these children will receive from their new homes and environments.


"This is about having families having a celebration, as opposed to some of the bitter families we see in court," Switalski said. "Each kid is unique, and there are going to be some individual challenges. But then, your natural kids are all different from each other. I think it's going to be a great opportunity."

The number of adoptions in Michigan's foster care system increased from 1,959 in 1993 to 2,927 in 2002. Experts attribute that climb to changes in state and federal rules that govern the adoption process and/or for terminating parental rights in cases of child abuse and neglect.

In cases like these, where a previous parent's rights were terminated by the court, officials said the adoptive parents should be ready for unique challenges and frustrations, particularly if the children are old enough to remember a prior poor home environment.

"I'm sure all of those issues do come up," said Michael Cory, a chief referee of the county's juvenile court. "But in the adoption process, we try to teach families to focus on the present and the future. What matters is the family as they are now."

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